

# Catana 50: A Couple's Quest

When a husband and wife sail this award-winning catamaran by themselves, the challenge isn't how to make it go faster.

**O**N THE MORNING WE were to sail the new Catana 50 south into the Florida Keys, it dawned on me that the floating dock put in place for the boat show and which made it easy to step aboard *Jadimean's* starboard sugar-scoop transom might make it tough to get under way. Strictly Sail Miami was still in break-down mode, and the Catana, you see, is a big boat. On that morning, all 1,295 square feet of her watery footprint filled most of the space between the float at her stern and another catamaran docked close across her bows.

Owner Jim Bridges, a couple of fellows from the catamaran parked in front of us, and I paced the dock, discussing wind direction and linehandling. We were more than a little worried that the high-freeboard hulls that give the catamaran considerable buoyancy for bluewater sailing and the sleek cabin house that promises luxurious living also create a good deal of windage, and the thought of the 33,000-pound catamaran getting away from us had left us stymied.

Jim's wife, Adean, listened to our nautical engineering schemes with some skepticism, then disappeared, only to return minutes later with the problem solved: She charmed the dock boys straightening up the marina into moving the float so we could back up and motor away.

"That's where she comes in," said Jim, hinting that perhaps this wasn't the first time Adean had stepped in with a timely solution as they learned the many ropes involved with owning their first big boat. As we toyed with the fenders and pre-

pared to cast off, I was looking forward to seeing firsthand how this two-person crew would tame a boat I knew could be a handful.

Months earlier and several hundred miles to the north, I'd been aboard *Jadimean* when *CW's* Boat of the Year judges had taken her out for sea trials on Chesapeake Bay on a day when the winds were gusting into the high 20s. In that breeze, things on board happened fast. We'd tack



**Jim and Adean Bridges work together aboard *Jadimean* to learn about both the boat and the cruising life.**

and sheets would go from overloaded and taut as steel to slack and flogging in an instant. We were, as they say, on our toes. Because of the considerable initial stability that makes multihulls reluctant to heel, the strain on the mast, shrouds, lines, and winches is many times that found on a similar-sized monohull. When all's going well, that power translates into speed, but when things head south, watch out.

Compounding things on this performance catamaran is the complexity of sailhandling systems for a 1,055-square-foot main, a 388-square-foot self-tacking jib, and the 1,076-square-foot screecher that's rolled up on the outer stay of the Catana's solent rig. Getting to know the boat is getting to know when to reef, and probably doing it sooner than later. And then there are the daggerboards, which enable the boat to sail close to the wind. When the boat's sailing closehauled, the polyester boards, which increase the draft to nine feet seven inches when deployed, need to be lowered.

The ride on this thoroughbred proved to be enchanting enough for the judges to name the Catana 50 as the Best Cruising Multihull, but during their deliberations one question repeatedly surfaced: Despite marketing claims that describe the boat as perfectly sized for a couple, was it in reality too much boat for any but a very experienced shorthanded multihull crew?

The answer, I'd come to learn, depends to a large extent on how the boat's sailed and on the skipper's ability to use his or her wits and available equipment, rather than muscles, to keep order when under way. Most owners wouldn't tack and jibe in close quarters, as the BOTY judges did for their testing purposes. Instead, they'd do as Jim and Adean did as we cleared the marina and headed for Government Cut: They'd motor. Pushed along by twin 75-horsepower Volvo diesels and saildrives, the Catana is both agile and quick. Steering stations, well outboard on either hull and each equipped with electronic shift and throttle controls, provide the skipper with all the agility needed when docking



**In sea trials off Annapolis, the Catana's powerful sail plan and performance-oriented design impressed *Cruising World's* Boat of the Year judges.**

MARK PILLSBURY

BILLY BLACK



In the saloon, Jim (above) uses his laptop and autopilot to steer; outside, Adean (above, right) drives while perched at one of the twin helms. *Jadimean's* modern interior (right) is an easy place to call home. A central winch (below) used to trim sail-control lines sits amidships in the roomy cockpit (opposite).



and maneuvering in a tight fairway. Visibility forward from either station is excellent, although the cabin house creates a blind spot across the opposite hull.

When we took *Jadimean* into open water off Fisher Island, the wind was in the high teens and out of the east as we rolled out the self-tending jib and turned south on a beam reach. With the main still in its boom-mounted pouch, our speed over the ground was about 7.5 knots, and as Jim shut down the engine and feathered the two three-bladed Volvo props, the ride was smooth. Hauling the mail long-distance is what this boat's meant for, as in trade-wind rides to the tropics or across ocean expanses, where sails can be set and then forgotten.

Jim and Adean were divers first, but they began chartering sailboats about eight years ago. They traveled to the islands a couple of times a year, then began taking sailing lessons on Chesapeake Bay, which is near to home and Jim's electrical-test-equipment design business in Westchester, Pennsylvania. Three

years ago, says Jim, he began to see light at the end of the workaday tunnel, and that's when the couple decided it might be time to buy a sailboat.

They'd chartered monohulls in New England and cats in the Caribbean, and Adean said she found that she favored the latter because she liked the room and comfort found on two hulls and because the lack of heeling meant less chance of becoming seasick. Jim, an electrical engineer, and Adean, with a background in software, carefully researched the market. They chartered a Catana 43 but thought it'd be too tight for their needs. Then, at the U.S. Sailboat show in Annapolis, they looked at a Catana 52, but they thought it was too big. That's when they learned that a new 50 was on the drawing board and being designed by a longtime Catana collaborator, French naval architect Christophe Barreau. Next thing you know, a deal was struck, a contract was signed, and Jim and Adean found themselves spending the next nine months buying all the toys they'd need for their

new boat: T-shirts, silverware, inflatable kayaks, folding bikes, lots of electronics, star-gazing gadgets, and rum. Yes, both are ardent Jimmy Buffett fans, and so, where others might store fine wines—in a rack built into the saloon's table—Jim keeps an assortment of rums, each for its own specialty drink, and a bottle of Stoli Vanil for his signature cocktail, the Key Lime Martini. (See "Jim's Most Excellent Libations," page 94.) Take my word for it, it's a concoction nearly as delicious as one of Adean's home-cooked dinners.

By late morning, the wind had gone light, and we raised the main. On the Catana, all sail-control lines lead back from the mast and under the deck to a central electric winch amidships on the transom. At first glance, lines of seemingly every color sprout in spaghetti-like fashion from a bank of line clutches. Each is marked, so it doesn't take long to sort out which is for what, but I think it would be worth an owner's while to spend some time here so lines will come to hand easily on a dark, windy night.

BILLY BLACK

To raise the main, we started the engines and rolled in the jib as Adean brought the boat's nose to the wind and engaged the Furuno autopilot to hold a steady course. The main halyard was then wrapped around the winch, which could be engaged by a switch at the helm, out from under the bimini and giving full view of the sail. It almost goes without saying that should the sail catch in the lazy jack (it did), the person raising it must head inboard to the winch and free the halyard. But once under the bimini, one can't see the sails, so there's no way to know how far to lower the main. It quickly became clear that this is a good job for two people, not just one.

Once it's raised, the halyard is locked off, and the two-part mainsheet is led to the electric winches adjacent to each helm station and next to the primary winches, which we soon put to use as we rolled out the code zero and the breeze settled down to about 10 knots. So rigged, *Jadimean* cruised along comfortably at eight knots.

MARK PILLSBURY (TOP LEFT), BILLY BLACK

Between and forward of the Catana's two wheels lies a large, comfortable cockpit holding a triangular teak table with molded benches along two sides; when folded out to a square top, stowaway chairs add additional seating. There are two large storage compartments under the cockpit sole, and more storage under the benches. Davits across the transom can accommodate a 12-foot inflatable, a fact Jim tells me while ticking off some of the lessons he's learned about the new boat. He'd bought a 10-foot inflatable instead, and it had a bit too much wobble room. It took some ingenuity, he says, to quell the chafe.

Ingenuity and perseverance were required in other areas, too, he says. As they sailed south from the Chesapeake, they discovered that a new boat, unlike a new car, isn't fully prepped off the showroom floor. Complex systems and electronics need to be understood, require maintenance, and occasionally break.

Topping his to-do list was the mainsail. The one the delivery crew used to sail

the boat across the Atlantic from France wasn't up to the task, and although the "S" shape it took when set during our Boat of the Year sea trials last October was interesting, it surely wasn't efficient. A new one from North had been ordered, but it wasn't available for our February sail into the Keys, which was unfortunate because it would've been fun to see how much faster *Jadimean* sailed when in proper trim.

"I thought, 'It's a brand new boat, so everything should work perfectly,'" says Jim. Instead, like many a new owner has discovered, he found that when it came to gear and systems, there was room for improvement. On the positive side, his research into problems caused him to dig in and learn about the systems tucked neatly behind the Catana's elegant, light-colored, foam-cored oak paneling and furniture, all set off by brushed aluminum accents.

Those systems include 24-volt DC electric and 110-volt DC shore power, six house and two starting batteries,

400 watts' worth of solar panels on the bimini, dual water pumps and hot-water heaters, black- and gray-water holding tanks, a 64-gallon-per-hour Aquabase watermaker, a washer/dryer located forward in the owners' hull to starboard, a full suite of Furuno instruments, and a Bose home-entertainment package.

As we sailed south, Jim and Adean took full advantage of the shade of the cabin and the visibility provided by its large ports, tinted to keep the sun out. Seated at the front-facing nav station located in the forward port corner of the saloon, Jim could monitor *Jadimean's* progress on a laptop mounted on the nav-station desk, backed up by a Furuno chart plotter and radar. Course changes could be dialed in with the twist of a knob on the Navpilot controls mounted nearby. Standing to starboard, Adean kept a paper chart and cruising guide open on the table; like the one in the cockpit, the table has a triangular top that can fold out to a square. The table's surrounded by deep, comfortable cushions covered in Alcantara upholstery.

In the saloon, an L-shaped galley lies to port, with the long leg of the L providing a counter than can double as a bar for entertaining. A large aluminum-framed window can be opened so the cook's a member of the party, whether it rages inside, outside, or both. Cooking is done

on a four-burner stove and oven or in a microwave. Refrigeration includes both fridge and freezer, and when it's time to clean up, there's an in-sink disposal.

In the owners' hull, a spacious, two-mattress berth is located aft on twin bases that lift on gas struts to get to storage areas underneath. A desk and hanging lockers are located amidships, with the washer/dryer and head forward and a shower and vanity forward of that, behind a watertight bulkhead and storage locker in the bow.

In the port hull, there are staterooms fore and aft, each with its own head and shower, and storage space for a serious amount of gear. After a long day on the move, I can attest to the comfort of the bunks and surroundings. Catching a good night's sleep wasn't a problem.

The Catana 50, which replaces the 471, moves away from pure performance to a crossover position that marries luxury, practicality, and performance. In deliberations last fall, *CW's* BOTY judges said they were impressed by quality construction (although they acknowledged that for \$1.15 million, nothing should be lacking). And they concluded that with a knowledgeable skipper who's spent the time to learn to sail the boat properly, the Catana would serve well as a long-range voyag-

er. On deck, handholds are well located, and movement fore and aft and beam to beam is unobstructed. Some catamarans mount the steering station behind a fiberglass bulkhead, but on the Catana, at either of the boat's wheels, the sails are in full view, you're surrounded by fresh air, and the water rushes past your side. On this boat, it's not difficult to find a space to call your own, whether you're below in a comfortable cabin, curled up by the table in the saloon, on a lounge chair in the cockpit, or lolling about on cushions forward of the mast.

And despite every creature comfort from home, thanks to the Airex foam sandwich construction used in the hulls and deck and to the cored panels in the interior's panels and furniture, the boat is still relatively light, even when loaded for cruising. The power generated by the 70-foot carbon-fiber rig translates directly into speed across the waves.

But is the Catana 50 a couple's boat? Perhaps not for everyone, and not if the majority of your sailing will be in the close confines of a busy harbor or bay. But as BOTY judge Steve Callahan said, if your plan is to take off cruising with friends and you want a platform that's big and fast and ocean capable, the Catana is all of that. After spending a day and night with Jim and Adean, I'd say it works for them. They rely on their autopilot to help with the steering, take full advantage of the Harken electric winches to handle the sails, and motor when conditions call for it. Their schedule is their own, so they delay departures to suit the weather, and though *Jadimean's* size and mast height might preclude some harbors, especially in the Keys, the boat's speed gives the couple the capability to reach others in time to beat a roving weather front. They've done their homework, they're learning all the systems, and, as Jim says, everything's under control as long as you stop and think about what you're doing before you do it.

One thing's for certain: At a time in their lives when they decided to go sailing, Jim and Adean found a boat that can take them over the horizon. In fact, after I left them at Key Largo following one enjoyable day and night, that's exactly where they went.

Mark Pillsbury is *CW's* senior editor and Boat of the Year director.



## Jim's Most Excellent Libations

After a day on the water, Jim Bridges, *Jadimean's* owner, entertains guests with his well-practiced concoctions. Out of all of his creations, these are his four favorites.

### Key Lime Martini

3 ounces Stolli Vanil  
1 ounce Cointreau  
2 ounces lime juice  
2 ounces pineapple juice  
Shake with ice and strain into glass.

**Serves one.**

### Parrothead

1 ounce Captain Morgan rum  
1 ounce coconut rum  
1 ounce pineapple rum  
1 ounce banana rum  
1 ounce blackberry brandy  
5 ounces pineapple or orange juice  
(or combination, depending on desired sweetness)

Serve over ice. **Serves one.**

### Hurricane

1 1/2 ounces Bacardi white rum  
1 1/2 ounces Appleton dark rum  
3 ounces orange juice  
3 ounces passion fruit juice  
Serve over ice. **Serves one.**

### Shark Attack

Prepare the Hurricane as above, then, with friends gathered round, add 1/2 ounce of grenadine to make a Shark Attack by pouring the grenadine into a small toy shark, then plunging the predator head-first into the glass. As the red cloud dissipates and rises to the surface, blow on your whistle and shout with vigor, "Shark attack!"

**M.P.**